ABSTRACT OF THE DISCLOSURE

A received PDU is sequentially identified by an n-bit frame
number (FN) and an m-bit hyper frame number (HFN), which are
synchronously maintained on first and second stations. The
second station determines an activation time at which a
ciphering key change is to occur, and composes a security mode
command that includes an identifying FN corresponding to the
activation time, and x least-significant bits (LSBs) from the
HFN of the identifying FN. The second station transmits the
security mode command to the first station. The x LSBs
contained in the security mode command enable the first station
to resolve cyclical ambiguities of the identifying FN to
properly construct an application time. The first station uses
a first ciphering key to decrypt PDUs with FNs sequentially
prior to the application time, and uses a second ciphering
key to decrypt PDUs with FNs sequentially on or after the
application time.